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FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6287  
INFO RUEHK/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 0214  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 7197  
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 5304  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 3844  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1104  
RUEHN/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 3915  
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 1139  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 3001  
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 7783  
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 5443  
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 0260  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORPORATION PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 2136  
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000861

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS AND PM  
MCC FOR D NASSIRY AND E BURKE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/18/2017

TAGS: PGOV PREL PTER PHUM MOPS CE

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: ABDUCTIONS PLAGUE MUSLIM COMMUNITY

REF: COLOMBO 842

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr., for reasons 1.4(b,d).

¶1. (S) SUMMARY: Muslim businessmen have been subjected to abductions for the first time in recent weeks, marking a new and disturbing trend. Following numerous complaints from Muslim community groups, Ambassador called on Sri Lanka Muslim Congress leader Rauff Hakeem (strictly protect), who stated that support for abductions of Muslim businessmen comes from "the very top." Opposition United National Party legislator Lakshman Seneviratne, speaking in Parliament, accused Defense Secretary Gothabaya Rajapaksa, Colombo Deputy-Inspector General of Police Rohan Abeywardena and former Air Force Squadron Leader Nishantha Gajanayake of orchestrating abductions. Ambassador raised U.S. concerns about the new trend of Muslim abductions with Foreign Minister Bogollagama on June 13 (reftel). END SUMMARY.

EMBASSY RECEIVES AN INFLUX OF COMPLAINTS

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¶2. (C) In recent weeks the Embassy has received several anonymous letters from Muslim groups alleging that they are being targeted for abduction for ransom. One such letter from the "Muslim Community in Sri Lanka," with no return address, states that "within a short period they have kidnapped and collected huge sums from Muslim businessmen." Several Muslim leaders have alleged that Muslim businessmen are being targeted for abduction now that most prominent Tamil businessmen have either paid off paramilitary groups or fled the country.

MUSLIM LEADER STATES ABDUCTIONS COME "FROM THE VERY TOP"

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¶3. (S) Sri Lanka Muslim Congress leader and Minister of Posts and Telecommunications Rauff Hakeem (strictly protect)

told Ambassador on June 14 that he believed that those carrying out abductions receive "patronage from the very top," but did not elaborate further. Hakeem stated that he has received many complaints from his constituents recently about abductions for ransom among the Muslim community but that victims were "petrified" to come forward and make a formal complaint. According to Hakeem, some prominent Muslim businessmen have decided to leave Sri Lanka until the threat of abduction subsides. In reference to government-sanctioned abductions of Muslim businessmen for ransom, Hakeem said that the Muslim community "has never seen this before."

UNP CONNECTS ABDUCTIONS TO GOTHABAYA

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**¶4.** (SBU) On June 6, during an emergency session of Parliament, United National Party (UNP) parliamentarian Lakshman Seneviratne accused Defense Secretary Gothabaya Rajapaksa, Colombo Deputy-Inspector General of Police Rohan Abeywardena and former Air Force Squadron Leader Nishantha Gajanayake of orchestrating abductions. Seneviratne stated that Gajanayake, a retired Air Force officer whose last assignment was as Executive Assistant to former Sri Lanka Armed Forces Commander Donald Perera, was Gothabaya's personal link to the Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal (TMVP, or "Karuna faction") in Colombo. He added that Gajanayake arranged abductions using the TMVP on orders from Gothabaya and with the assistance of police officers acting under Abeywardena. Although Seneviratne did not differentiate between Muslim abductions and Tamil abductions during his condemnation of the Defense Secretary, he did lodge specific accusations concerning the abduction of a prominent Muslim

COLOMBO 00000861 002 OF 002

businessman against Defense Spokesman Keheliya Rambukwella's security detail, leading to angry exchanges in Parliament. Seneviratne stated that a Muslim businessman's brother told him that Rambukwella's bodyguards lured the businessman to a hotel in Kandy and then held him for ransom, demanding a "colossal" sum of money.

EMBASSY INTERLOCUTORS DETAIL ABDUCTION METHODS

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**¶5.** (S) Several credible Embassy interlocutors, including members of the Center for Policy Alternatives (strictly protect), a respected Sri Lankan NGO, have described how abductions of prominent Muslim businessmen sometimes occur. They told us that abductors illegally obtain copies of prominent businessmen's bank documents from corrupt bank officers. A source in the Central Bank's Financial Intelligence Unit said he believes the banks tip off abductors immediately after a large transfer appears in a businessman's account. According to reports, the businessman is then abducted and held in a number of different safehouses, at least two of which are located in Kandy, requiring the abductors to pass several checkpoints between Kandy and Colombo. Contacts told us the businessman's family is directed to pay between 20 and 50 million rupees (approximately 200,000 to 500,000 U.S. dollars), or the businessman will be killed. One interlocutor related that after payment is made, the businessman is escorted with the help of the Sri Lankan military out of the country to Singapore. He is told not to return to Sri Lanka or his family members will be killed. The Embassy has received reports of 11 Tamil and Muslim businessmen transported to Singapore after ransom has been paid.

**¶6.** (C) COMMENT: The negative impact of abductions is spreading beyond the Tamil community and past extra-judicial methods of dealing with possible LTTE supporters into abductions of any minority with a large bank account. Muslim leaders like Rauff Hakeem are increasingly critical of the Rajapaksa administration's apparent tolerance for abductions, and numerous recent media reports have called attention to the growing trend of Muslim abductions for ransom. The

Ambassador met with Foreign Minister Bogollagama on June 13  
in part to flag to the Government our concern about this new  
trend and the need for the GSL to address it (reftel).

BLAKE